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ABSTRACT

The British Museum Library and Reading Room played a significant role in George Bernard Shaw's literary life. Having already read every book that had come his way, Shaw first gravitated toward the reading room in 1880, where he began work on his second novel and drafted most of his three remaining novels. His literary, artistic and musical background led him to conclude that, although he lacked academic qualifications, he was better educated than most university scholars. This education however, often led him to unorthodox, even startling, conclusions about the relevance of literature, including his recommendation of "Lady Chatterly's Lover" as requisite reading for young girls. He also claimed to know the aesthetic value of books as works of art, noting that finely printed books were as scarce as well written ones, and leading him to scrupulous involvement in the typesetting of his own works. Shaw decried collectors, and was wont to destroy his first drafts and much of his correspondence. He was, nevertheless, a generous benefactor of libraries, leaving his estate to the British Museum, the National Gallery of Ireland, and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. His remaining literary manuscripts and papers, the largest single gift ever given to that institution, were also left to the British Museum, "in acknowledgement of the incalculable value to me of my daily resort to the Reading Room of that Institution at the beginning of my career." (HTH)

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Shaw, Books, and Libraries

Humanities Research Center University of Texas at Austin

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Self-portrait, 1931, by Bernard Shaw. Quotations from Shaw by permission of the Society of Authors as agent for the Estate of George Bernard Shaw.

Dedicated in fond memory of Jacob Blanck

For some two hundred years the well-to-do Englishman has had his London club as a home away from home. More than forty such establishments—social and political—coexisted in central London in the latter part of the nineteenth century, many of them tracing their origins to eighteenth-century coffee houses and restaurants. For those individuals not yet successful and comfortably off but interested in literature and other branches of scholarly learning, a club existed of a unique type in London or, for that matter, anywhere in the world: a club, founded in 1753, open indiscriminately to all, regardless of creed, economic condition, or sex. Its name was the British Museum.

The variegated membership roster of this scholarly haven for the intellectual individualist included Karl Marx, until his death in 1883; Samuel Butler, the author of *Erewhon*; Dr. F. J. Furnivall, the great Shakespeare textual scholar; Thomas J. Wise, a young collector and bibliographer, later to be known as the Jack-the-Ripper

Note: This is a slightly revised and abridged text of a lecture delivered on 21 February 1974, under the auspices of the Department of English and the Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

of the King's Library; the Honorable Bertrand Russell; the dishonorable George Gissing; the incipient critic William Archer; the insipid novelist Marie Corelli; Beatrice Potter, soon to be Mrs. Sidney Webb, researching for Charles Booth's monumental study of *The Life and Labours of the People of England*; young Willie Yeats, with flamboyant tie, toiling for his living by hand-copying Caxton's *Aesop* for the publisher David Nutt; Ernest Renan, the religious scholar, wandering about, in Yeats's words, "looking like an old, fat priest"; and a red-bearded, shabbily clad, attenuated fellow named George Shaw, struggling to bring forth a series of novels that nobody wanted to publish.

Communism came to his rescue, said Bernard Shaw in 1901: "[T]hough almost penniless I had a magnificent library in Bloomsbury . . . without any servants to look after or rent to pay." In the 1890s he had advised a young free-lance journalist acquaintance to "get a ticket for the British Museum library, and study the drama there up to eight every night with all the advantages of communal heating, lavatory accommodation and electric light, with a comfortable seat, unlimited books, and ink and blotting-paper all for nothing. . . . With the British Museum Reading Room round the corner . . . you are five hundred [pounds] a year richer than Shakespeare."

George Gissing, in his novel *New Grub Street*, reminded his readers that the British Museum Reading Room was known to its frequenters as "The Valley of

the Shadow of Books," and Edward Reardon, the protagonist in Gissing's book, thought to himself, "What a blessed refuge it was, there under the great dome, when he must else have sat in his windy garret with the mere pretence of a fire! The reading-room was his true home; its warmth enwrapped him kindly. . . ."

Henry Ryecroft, early in Gissing's quasi-autobiography *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, recalled that "once, on going down into the [British Museum] lavatory to wash my hands, I became aware of a notice newly set up above the row of basins. It ran somehow thus: 'Readers are requested to bear in mind that these basins are to be used only for casual ablutions!' Oh, the significance of that inscription! Had I not myself, more than once, been glad to use this soap and water more largely than the sense the authorities contemplated? And there were poor fellows working under the great dome whose need, in this respect, was greater than mine."

Shaw's first act on obtaining a reader's ticket, according to Frank Harris, was to call for all the books on etiquette that he could find in the subject catalogue. The most valuable of these to him, Shaw later acknowledged, was *Manners and Tone of Good Society, or, Solecisms to be Avoided*, by A Member of the Aristocracy. Shaw first gravitated to the Reading Room in 1880; there he commenced work on his second novel, *The Irrational Knot*, and there he drafted in shorthand most of his remaining three novels: *Love Among the Artists*, *Cashel Byron's Profession*, and *An Unsocial Socialist*, unaware that one

day most of these manuscripts would return to the library as literary treasure.

The extent to which Shaw used the Reading Room is reflected in the preface to his first novel, *Immaturity*, written in 1879–80 but not published until half a century later. "One day," Shaw reminisced, "as I was sitting in the reading room . . . beginning my fifth and last novel, *An Unsocial Socialist*, I saw a young lady with an attractive and arresting expression, bold, vivid, and very clever, working at one of the desks. On that glimpse of a face I instantly conceived the character and wrote the description of Agatha Wylie. I have never exchanged a word with that lady; never made her acquaintance; saw her again under the same circumstances but very few times; yet if I mention her name, which became well known in literature (she too was writing a novel then, probably, and perhaps had the hero suggested to her by my profile), she will be set down as Agatha Wylie to her dying day. . . ." Unfortunately, Shaw did not, even at this late date, identify the lady.

If Shaw's fellow readers inspired him to creativity, they sometimes also distracted him from his purpose, as witness a poem which he composed on 11 April 1882 while seated at his desk under the great dome:

Violet Beverly
No matter how cleverly
I try to work when you sit beside me
At set of sun
There is nothing done

Only the unwritten page to chide me
Only your empty chair to deride me

It is something to have learned your name
And something more to have heard your voice
Though I came not hither with any such aim
Though you sat beside me by chance, not choice.
Oh, Violet, Violet, why do you come
To read about your primeval kind
To a place where men must be deaf and dumb
But where, alas! they must not be blind?
I came to write, and I stayed to look
I dared not offend, yet could not refrain
And so, whilst you sat there deep in your book
I studied your face again and again.
And thus, Miss Beverly
No matter how cleverly
I strive to work as you sit beside me
At set of sun
I have nothing done
There is only my unwritten page to chide me
Only your empty chair to deride me.

Beneath this Shaw has written: "Subsequently there is reason to believe that her name, after all, is not Violet Beverly, but Mabel Crofton. Consequently . . . 'Mabel Crofton, no matter how often . . .' &c &c."

"From Plato and Pythagoras," Shaw wrote in an essay on libraries in 1921, "to Descartes and Einstein there have been single men who would have justified all that the British Museum costs by spending one week of their

lives in it. I myself worked in its reading room daily for about eight years at the beginning of my literary career; and oh (if I may quote Wordsworth) the difference to me!"

Shaw worked in the British Museum every day, reading through the entire *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, except for the scientific articles; boning up on medical and municipal statistics for lectures; studying treatises on music and elocution for his musical criticism; writing letters; meeting friends. The British Museum was his university, for most of Shaw's knowledge came, not from formal education (he had finished with school at fifteen), but from his own persistent studies.

Saturated with Shakespeare and the Bible before he was ten, Shaw claimed to have read all of Dickens's novels by the time he had become, as he playfully described himself, "a cynical, blasé person of twelve or thirteen." As a boy he read all the Grimm fairy tales, *The Arabian Nights*, *Robinson Crusoe*, Byron's *Don Juan*, Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Cowper's *The Diverting History of John Gilpin*. He read histories of Scotland and Ireland, and Robertson's dull biography of Charles V. His seagoing uncle smuggled pirated American editions of Trollope into Ireland for his nephew. He read Mark Twain's early stories and *The Innocents Abroad*. Alexandre Dumas père, he reported, "made French history like an opera by Meyerbeer for me." His favorite book of all was Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.

"I cannot recollect any time," Shaw reflected, "when

I could not and did not read everything that came in my way. . . . I have no more recollection of my first book than of my first meal." But, he said, he never could read and enjoy children's books. "From the accursed *Swiss Family Robinson* onwards, I always loathed and despised [children's books] for their dishonesty, their sickening immorality, and their damnable dullness. My moral sense, like my literary taste, was sound."

This literary background, added to his knowledge of music and of art (resulting from his family's participation in the amateur musical life of Dublin and Shaw's frequent childhood visits to the National Gallery of Ireland, which he later called the "cherished asylum of my boyhood"), allowed him to say not without validity that, though he had no academic qualifications, he was in fact more highly educated than most university scholars. At the British Museum Shaw applied for more than three hundred books a year, each year that he was a frequenter of the Reading Room. In later years, whenever a subject mentioned in the newspapers or on the wireless intrigued him he would, as a subscriber to the London Library, send a note asking to borrow a book on that topic. In December 1948, when he was in his ninety-third year, we find him asking the librarian: "Is there a book in the library on the Elephantine papyri?"

Shaw's education, however, often led him to unorthodox, even startling, conclusions about the relevance of literature. At a time when D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was being condemned as obscene smut,

Shaw was recommending it to young people—as a document! "If I had a marriageable daughter, what could I give her to read to prepare her? Dickens? Thackeray? George Eliot? Walter Scott? Trollope? or even any of the clever modern women who take such a fiendish delight in writing very able novels that leave you hopeless and miserable? They would teach her a lot about life and society and human nature. But they would leave her absolutely in the dark as to marriage. Even Fielding and Joyce and George Moore would be no use: instead of telling her nothing they would tell her worse than nothing. But she would learn something from *Lady Chatterley*. I shouldnt let her engage herself if I could help it until she had read that book. Lawrence had delicacy enough to tell the best and brutality enough to rub in the worst. *Lady Chatterley* should be on the shelves of every college for budding girls. They should be forced to read it on pain of being refused a marriage license. But it is not as readable as *Ivanhoe* or *A Tale of Two Cities*."

Shaw also professed to know the aesthetic value of books as works of art. To Sydney Cockerell in 1906, concerning a visit to the home of the sculptor Rodin, for whom he had posed, Shaw wrote: "As a collector in the plastic line . . . he is, like [William] Morris, never wrong —no curios, nothing but the right things, and all of them treasures. But he does not know what a book is. He has Pliny in 20 volumes, Quintilian in a lot more, autographed presentation copies of all sorts of rubbish, and

a few old bindings. . . . He knows absolutely nothing about books—thinks they are things to be read."

In 1949 he told the printer and designer Ruari McLean: "My acquaintance with Morris led me to look at the page of a book as a picture, and a book as an ornament. This led to a certain connoisseurship in types and typesetting." Morris, Shaw told his biographer Archibald Henderson, taught him that a book might be "a beautiful object . . . admired as such by a man who cannot read a word of it, exactly as a twelfth century chalice or loving cup may be cherished by a heathen or a teetotaller, quite apart from its use as a drinking cup. Darwin's *Origin of Species* is a sordid object, a medieval bestiary is often a masterpiece. Caxton's silliest books are better from this point of view than the first folio Shakespear; but this doesnt mean that the author was a greater writer than Shakespear."

Along similar lines he had noted in 1902 that finely printed books were just as scarce as well-written ones, and that every author should realize that the world's most valuable books derive their worth from the craft of the printer rather than from the genius of the author. "I have seen a . . . medieval natural history, the worthless compilation of a childish liar, purchased for £800 in a city where the works of Shakespear sell for tenpence halfpenny. And if you want to buy a Shakespear for £60, you must bid for one of the volumes of his sonnets which Morris printed at the Kelmscott Press." Shaw had only one compunction about the manufacture of fine books—

their issuance in vellum bindings. "Vellum copies fill me with horror," he said. "As a vegetarian, I do not eat veal; and I happen to know what vellum is."

In 1898 Shaw issued his earliest dramatic works in two volumes, calling them *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant*, and in the process he revealed how extensively he had become a disciple of William Morris. He insisted on narrow margins; he demanded specimen pages from the printer; he selected the paper and the binding cloth, and policed all details of production. Desirous of emulating Morris in the use of a Caslon Old-Face type but, unlike the founding fathers of the private press movement, having no unearned income with which to indulge costly whims, Shaw hunted until he found a unionized shop that had among its fonts the type he sought. This was the printing firm of R. & R. Clark, in Edinburgh, with whom Shaw dealt from 1897 until his death in 1950 in what must surely be the longest association between printer and author in the whole history of printing—particularly one in which the author, for all but the first five of those fifty-three years, was his own publisher.

Shaw was so concerned about the correct setting of type for his works that he found himself, he said, like Morris, "playing tricks with my text solely to avoid ending a paragraph with a short line." Shaw's books from the first were set in a primer Caslon with even roman small capitals; lower case italics (always in square brackets) for stage directions; and text words wide-letter-spaced to indicate emphasis, rather than italicized,

as Shaw believed this offered greater typographical charm. The texts were handset, for Shaw liked a colorful block of letterpress without white rivers running through it. He complained that modern printing ink was not black enough; he demanded the blackest ink the market could provide.

In 1903, to protect the American copyright of his new play *Man and Superman*, Shaw sent proofs to the University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, to be reset there by the printer, William Dana Orcutt, to fulfill technical demands of publication. When he had examined the results, he wrote to Orcutt:

> [L]et me beg you not to be offended if I tell you that whilst I am astonished at the way in which you have followed my proof sheets line by line . . . the book, as you have produced it, is a perfectly shocking piece of printing—almost as bad as the work of the Roycroft Shop, which is the worst in the world. Dont be angry; just turn to p. 130. Look at the last ten lines. I have marked the blemishes. The enormous quads at the end of each sentence are bad enough; but when it comes to allowing two of these gaps to occur at the same point in two successive lines, it amounts to a misdemeanor. Now your compositor has actually put four of these gaps in a straight line down the page. Four! He ought to be boiled!
>
> If you look at one of the books printed by William Morris, the greatest printer of the XIX century, and one of the greatest printers of all the centuries, you will see that he occasionally puts in a little leaf ornament. . . . Your Roycroft idiots, not understanding this, pepper such things all over their "art" books, and generally manage to stick an extra large quad before each to show how little they understand about the business. Morris does not do this in his own books; he rewrites the sentence so as to make it justify without bringing a gap underneath another in the line above. But in print-

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ing other people's books, which he had no right to alter, he sometimes found it impossible to avoid this. Then, sooner than spoil the rich, even color of his block of letterpress by a big, white hole, he filled it up with a leaf [ornament].

Now that is 99% of the secret of good printing. Dont have patches of white or trickling rivers of it trailing down the page like raindrops on a window. At the top of p. 131, I have marked these rivers. Are they not horrible? *White* is the enemy of the printer. *Black*, rich, fat, even, black, without grey patches, are, or should be, his pride. Leads and quads and displays of different kinds of type should be reserved for insurance prospectuses and advertisements of lost dogs. . . .

Now for the minor points. Your margins are very far from being those of the Mazarin Bible. Your top margin is a full inch—*much* too wide . . . and the lower only 1¼". The difference is only enough to make them look equal. Try ½" for the top margin, ignoring the title and pagination and measuring from the top line of the text, and the top and bottom margins will come about right. The inner margins are monstrous—¾" each, making a Broadway of 1½" down the middle of the book, so that it looks like two tombstones side by side. The rule here is simple: the book, when open, should look as if there were no division at all. . . . I send you my [Edinburgh] title page, and invite you to note that there are no rivers in it (there is a Mississippi and a Missouri in yours), and that the measure of the publisher's imprint has been contracted to avoid a big quad after the colon. See how nice and fat and black and solid it looks!

Then, after two more paragraphs of detailed criticism, Shaw concluded:

That, I think, is all. Do not dismiss it as not being "business": I assure you I have a book [the Kelmscott Chaucer] which Morris gave me — a single copy—by selling which I could cover the whole cost of setting up the "Superman"; and its value is due *solely* to its having been manufactured in the way I advocate: there's abso-

lutely no other secret about it; and there is no reason why you should not make yourself famous through all the ages by turning out editions of standard works on these lines whilst the Roycroft people are exhausting themselves in dirty felt end papers, sham Kelmscott capitals, leaf ornaments in quad sauce, and then wondering why nobody in Europe will pay twopence for a Roycroft book, whilst Kelmscott books and the Doves Press books of Morris's friends [Emery] Walker and Cobden Sanderson fetch fancy prices before the ink is thoroughly dry.

As times changed, so did Shaw's ideas about printing. For his Standard Edition (which appeared in 1931–32), he noted that he had changed the type face because the small type he had hitherto used proved troublesome to keep clean. He resisted mechanical linotype and monotype for years because they would not justify as well as hand set could be made to do, "but at last," he admitted, "as always happens, the machine outdid the hand, and got all the best types on it."

It is reflective of the ascetic nature of his life that, though he could admire artistic work, Shaw had no collector's instinct, and owned virtually no fine books or works of art. Those he received he generally gave away. He presented his Kelmscott Chaucer to Rodin, and virtually all of the famous portraits and sculptures of himself were distributed to institutions. His home in Ayot St. Lawrence contained, at the time of his death, one piece of Rodin sculpture, fewer than half a dozen "rare" books, and no paintings worthy of note.

To R. J. Hayes, chief librarian of the National Library of Ireland, in 1945, Shaw wrote that he did not collect

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first editions: "I destroy them to suppress their blunders. Other people collect my letters. Keeping [letters] is a mischievous habit. Dickens burned all his at Gadshill very wisely." Shaw himself burned many *personal* letters, including the ones he had written to Annie Besant, which she returned after their brief romance had ended, as well as many of those he had received from his first love, Jenny Patterson, in a covenant with Jenny's executrix, who destroyed all of his letters to Jenny. In the last year of his life he informed an actress who had requested a gift of one of his scraps of manuscript: "Damn it! I'm not a dealer in relics. As a baptized Protestant, I abhor them. If you worship them, our ways shall lie for ever apart. Collectors are among the plagues of my life."

It gave him great amusement, in 1930, to discover that a number of letters and manuscripts had been forged by a man of his acquaintance and passed off as authentic Shaviana. Instead of exposing the culprit Shaw sat back and quietly enjoyed the spectacle of collectors greedily snapping up the non-authentic documents and paying enormous sums of money for them. He was equally pleased to be able to inform a collector who had shelled out a small fortune at the Hatton sale in 1929 for a book described as extensively annotated by Shaw that the notations were the work of his wife's non-famous father! And when a friend sent him a just-published study of Shelley, Shaw jested: "Perhaps I will annotate a copy and sell it to an American millionaire for £500."

Shaw's working method in principle, he proclaimed,

was to destroy the shorthand drafts of his works after they had been transcribed. In fact, however, there wasn't a word of truth to the statement, though he iterated it throughout his long lifetime. It was merely a defense mechanism to protect him from incessant demands of collectors and friends for copies of his manuscripts. Actually, the draft manuscripts of all but four of his major plays survive, as do the manuscripts of four of his novels (most of the leaves of the fifth, *Love Among the Artists*, were inadvertently fed to the dustman), and the drafts of a considerable number of his nondramatic writings are extant as well. Occasionally he presented them as gifts—*Saint Joan* to the British Museum, *John Bull's Other Island* to Sydney Cockerell, *Passion, Poison and Petrifaction* to the Actors' Orphanage charity auction—but invariably he intimated that the survival of these particular manuscripts was quite accidental and extraordinary.

At heart a charitable man, Shaw was more generous than he liked to let on. Although as early as 1892 he had recommended a letter-destroying compact with Sidney Webb, he not only preserved a good deal of his correspondence, but later returned the letters to the authors, or to their widows, as in the case of Mrs. Frank Harris and Mrs. G. K. Chesterton, so that in a time of financial distress they could sell both sides of the correspondence together for inflated sums. For the same reason he frequently sent holograph interviews, unsolicited, to indigent journalists of his acquaintance at moments of crisis

in their lives, aware that they would be able not only to sell the interview to Fleet Street but to dispose of the manuscript itself to a dealer in autographs for a second source of needed income. It was his way of giving charity without embarrassing the recipient with offers of money.

When his longtime friend Henry Salt, who possessed a good many of Shaw's letters, was struggling for economic survival, GBS tactfully suggested that he sell the useless old correspondence while the market was there, and live in comfort for the rest of his life. Salt sold the letters, bought a country cottage with the proceeds, and lived in comfort for the rest of his life!

When a friend chided Shaw for his supposed mania for destroying literary manuscripts and pointed out how grateful he would be to uncover just one of Shakespeare's manuscripts, Shaw replied: "If I had the choice of examining either one of Shakespear's manuscripts or his tailor's bills, I would choose the latter. They would tell me much more about the Man and his Times." For this reason Shaw in his will bequeathed to the British Library of Political and Economic Science of the London School of Economics his "account books Bank passbooks paid cheques and their counterfoils expired agreements box office returns and other records of my business operations and personal and business expenditure capable of being used by economic or legal historians or by biographers seeking documentary evidence as to prices and practices during the period covered by my lifetime." The bequest also included his shorthand diaries for 1885–97 and half a century of appointments books.

His wastebasket too proved a researchers' gold mine. Blanche Patch, his secretary during the last thirty years of his life, and Dr. F. E. Loewenstein, his literary assistant, as well as some of his local friends at Ayot, preserved many of Shaw's discarded scraps and passed them on to "dealers in relics." Five huge cartons of these scraps were bought by the American collector T. E. Hanley, and came with his collection to the University of Texas in 1958. The value of these fragments may be suggested by a single illustration.

Among the papers at Texas were several snippets of paper on which Shaw had attempted to construct a kind of annuary of places visited and activities indulged in during his earlier years. Alongside one of the dates, January 1898, he had noted "Timewell pamphlet and Gadfly dramatization." The second entry was an obvious reference to the adaptation Shaw had made of Ethel Voynich's successful novel *The Gadfly* as a courtesy to her to protect its stage rights. "Timewell pamphlet," however, remained cryptic until juxtaposed with a hitherto unexplained statement in a Shaw letter to Ellen Terry on 29 January 1898, which commenced: "Oh, Ellen, Ellen, what a week!" and outlined, among its crowded activities, "a pamphlet to write about the Southwark police business (just completed)...." The combination of "Timewell pamphlet" and "Southwark police business" enabled me to determine that a pamphlet in the British Museum, ostensibly the work of James Timewell, honorary secretary of the Police and Public Vigilance Society, entitled *The Southwark Police Case and Its Moral,*

had actually been drafted for Timewell by Shaw. Without that wastebasket nugget in the Texas collection, Shaw's authorship might never have been determined.

Despite his lack of personal involvement in collecting, Shaw kept abreast of market conditions. To Mrs. Gilbert Chesterton in 1930 he reported that there had been a drastic slump since the Wall Street crash: "A relic previously worth about £60 went the other day for £3.10. Its owner almost committed suicide." And when it suited him to do so Shaw was not averse to making personal use of collectors. For a sale of books from his library, at Sotheby's in July 1949, he painstakingly inscribed extended comments (which he had previously drafted in shorthand) on the flyleaves of a number of the limited or private-press editions to increase their sale value, as in Charlotte Shaw's copy of the 1926 edition of T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

Not infrequently he made sport of the mania of collectors for "points" in building a library of rare first editions. In June 1929 the writer E. V. Lucas sent to him a copy of Shaw's first published play, *Widowers' Houses*, issued in 1893, which had come from Conal O'Riordan's library. It had been given to Lucas to send to Shaw with a request that he inscribe it for sale at a charity auction for the Royal Literary Fund. Shaw responded with a long letter to Lucas on the flyleaf of the book, which began:

My dear Lucas

What puzzles me about this book is its blue cover. Henry & Co. published it in a green colored cloth case of the shade called

citrine. Publishing books by me—or plays by anybody—was in those days a sign of inexperienced optimism on the part of a publisher (except at the author's expense) and was generally followed by bankruptcy or retirement from business. When Henry & Co. honorably retired in due course, they very magnanimously presented me with the unsewn and unbound remainder of the edition; and I had this remainder bound for myself in mauve cloth to distinguish it from the sold copies.

And now Conal comes along with this BLUE copy which he says he bought from Henry & Co. . . . I never saw or heard of any blue copies.

Consequently, though I am actually writing these words in a blue copy I deny its existence, and reject Conal's yarn as incompatible with the evidence of the author, who surely ought to know more about it.

If Shaw did not collect books he remained throughout his life a generous benefactor of libraries. He helped T. E. Lawrence raise £400 to purchase the manuscript of Charles Doughty's *The Dawn in Britain* for presentation to the British Museum. After Charlotte Shaw's death he gave to the same library the letters he had written to her throughout the years, as well as all of the letters he had preserved from Ellen Terry. When, in going through old files, he found letters from Henry and William James, he made a gift of them to the Houghton Library. To the National Library of Ireland, which had requested something of his to preserve for Irish posterity, he presented the surviving longhand copies of four of his novels, after first arranging for them to be repaired and attractively bound at his expense by Douglas Cockerell.

Nor did he blind himself to the economics of maintaining public institutions and services. In 1928 he wrote, in

The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism: "These institutions cost a great deal of money to which we all have to contribute. . . . Because we can enter the National Gallery or the British Museum . . . without paying at the doors, some of us seem to think that they grew by the roadside like wildflowers. But they cost us a great deal of money from week to week. The British Museum has to be swept and dusted and scrubbed more than any private house, because so many more people tramp through it with mud on their boots. The salaries of the learned gentlemen who are in charge of it are a trifle compared with the cost of keeping it tidy."

When he drew up his final will, Shaw did not direct his philanthropy to the endowment of a hospital or research laboratory, to the establishment of university scholarships, or to a home for the aged or indigent. All of these things, he believed, were the social responsibility of the state, not of the well-intentioned individual. As he had argued way back in 1896 in his essay "Socialism for Millionaires," "[B]equests to the public should be for the provision of luxuries, never of necessaries. We must provide necessaries for ourselves. . . ." Do not give the people what they want, give them what they ought to want and don't: give them, he insisted, the luxuries of great art—art of the theatre, of the gallery, of the library. At his death, accordingly, he left the bulk of his residuary estate to the theatre, the gallery, and the library.

Shaw's estate at the time of his death had a value,

before taxes, of £367,000 in cash, copyrights, property, and other liquid assets: it was the largest English literary estate on record. In 1956 Shaw's copyrights were reassessed by the British government, as the value of the copyright had, according to its estimate, appreciated by more than fifty percent within a period of six years. A comic sidelight of this situation was that W. Somerset Maugham had been looking forward for years to being recognized upon his death as the most monetarily successful author in history, and had had no reason to doubt he would attain this honor when, to his horror and dismay, the Public Trustee, as administrator of Shaw's estate, authorized the adaptation of the play *Pygmalion* into the musical comedy *My Fair Lady*. By the time Maugham expired, Shaw's estate had garnered several million pounds in income from all sources, the copyrights had increased enormously in value, and W. Somerset Maugham had to be content to die the second wealthiest author in history.

Under the terms of Shaw's will, after disbursals for annuities and other specific monetary bequests, one third of all the income of his residuary estate was bequeathed to the British Museum, one third to the National Gallery of Ireland, and one third to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. In addition, the entire Shaw archive of literary manuscripts, correspondence, and other papers, constituting the largest single gift ever made to that institution, went to the British Museum "in acknowledgment," said Shaw in the will, "of the incalculable

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value to me of my daily resort to the Reading Room of that Institution at the beginning of my career." To date Shaw's gift has provided more than one and a half million pounds to each of the three residuary legatees.[1]

All literary men owe a debt to libraries, but none has repaid it so magnanimously as did Bernard Shaw, the Fabian Socialist. As St. John Ervine noted in his centenary biography: "His testament is one of the most public-spirited in the whole history of bequests."

[1] Although this information comes from a reliable source, the figures are not official. The legatees have consistently declined to divulge the precise amount of income received from the bequest lest it create an impression of affluence and discourage additional contributions.

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